



Disability Services Beacon

Information and Resources from the Fairfax Area Disability Services Board

Preparing for an Emergency

Are you prepared for an emergency? Are you prepared at home, at work, in a public place, or in your car? Recent events—man-made ones such as terrorism and natural disasters like hurricanes—have made people more aware of the need to be prepared for emergencies. Government agencies at the federal, state, and local level are responsible for planning and implementing coordinated responses to emergencies. Employers also need to be prepared in emergencies to keep their employees safe. But at the end of the day, you are responsible for your own well-being and safety. For people with disabilities, this means preparing for emergencies and assuring that their particular needs are met during emergencies.

No one emergency preparedness plan can meet the needs of all people with disabilities, at all times. Plans have to be as individual as the people who will follow them. The resources listed in this issue are useful in helping everyone, but especially people with disabilities, develop plans to prepare for emergencies.

What can people with disabilities do to be ready for an emergency? First, advance preparation is most important. Advance preparation gives people an understanding of what they should do in the event of a real emergency and what steps need to be taken ahead of time to prepare for it. That preparation keeps people from feeling overwhelmed. Periodically reviewing or rehearsing the plan keeps it fresh and vital. Good preparation will always pay off in an actual emergency. Emergency plans should include how to communicate with families, caregivers, and others interested in the welfare of the persons with disabilities.

Continued on page 3

Communication is the lifeline of emergency preparedness. Agencies have to communicate clearly with the public about emergencies and what the public needs to do. Individuals have to communicate their plans with the people who care about them and those that can help them in emergencies. Yet clear communication poses the greatest challenges for people with disabilities. Emergency alerts are not consistently captioned for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Or information is not presented in a way that's easily understood for people with cognitive difficulties. Emergency agencies struggle with these communication problems, so it's vital that residents with disabilities let them know clearly and often what doesn't work well for them.

Currently, notices of emergencies are broadcast on radio and TV. Fairfax County no longer uses sirens but instead relies on broadcasts through media outlets. Weather alert broadcasts are also used to alert the public and provide information during emergencies. Residents might want to consider purchasing weather alert radios designed to get emergency alerts.

The Emergency Management Office in Fairfax County is also working on other ways of communicating with the public, such as broadcasting emergency messages through e-mail, and text messages on cell phones and pagers. That system is currently being piloted. In addition, the county will soon be able to dial homes and businesses with an emergency message in defined areas. So if there's a gas leak, for example, the system can dial the homes that could be affected by the leak to tell residents to evacuate.

Fairfax Area Disability Services Board

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Resources for More Information

The two federal agencies responsible for emergencies are the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of Homeland Security. The mission of FEMA is to help the nation to be ready to respond to disasters of all kind. Their Web site, www.fema.gov, provides information for agencies, businesses, and the general public. In addition, a link on their site leads to information about establishing a family disaster plan and a series of checklists on things such as supplies to have on hand, people with disabilities, helping children cope with disaster, and food and water in an emergency, for example. They can also be reached at 202-566-1600, TTY 711. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security deals primarily with man-made threats such as terrorism. Their Web site, www.ready.gov contains information such

as a list of frequently asked questions. To reach them by phone, dial 1-800-237-3239, TTY 1-800-464-6161.

The National Organization on Disability works closely with the Department of Homeland Security, and has an active program in association with business and community leaders to ensure that the disability community is included in the emergency planning process. Their Web site is www.nod.org/emergency, and they can also be reached at 202-293-5960, TTY 202-293-5968.

The National Center on Emergency Preparedness for People with Disabilities provides resources to help local emergency planning organizations include the specialized needs of people with disabilities, with a focus on training. Their Web site is at www.disabilitypreparedness.com, and they can be reached at 202-546-4464 ext 201, TTY 711.

The Center for Disability Issues and the Health Professions focuses on improving the capabilities of health care providers to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. The Web site includes a comprehensive guide entitled "Evacuation Preparedness" which has a variety of items to help prepare in advance, such as how to give first responders quick crucial information. That document can be found at www.cdihp.org/evacuationpdf.htm.



The Office of Emergency Management, part of Fairfax County Government, is the source for local information. They can be found on the Web at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/oem/ and information about planning and hazards can be found at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ps/es/hazards.htm#planning. In addition, they can be reached at 703-324-2362, TTY 703-324-2935.

Si Ud. necesita información en español, llame a Carmen Sánchez al
703-324-5868, TTY 703-449-1186.

Preparing for an Emergency

continued from page 1

Plans should also include what to do in if the emergency requires that an area be evacuated or that people need to stay put. Staying put can include shelter in place in situations where the outside environment is dangerous or unhealthy.

Secondly, people with disabilities should establish personal support networks to be lifelines in actual emergencies. A personal support network is made up of persons who are regularly in the same physical area as the person with a disability. This may mean that a person may need a network for when he is at home and a different support network at work, school, or place of worship, for example. The purpose of a personal support network is to have people who will check with the person in the event of an emergency and who are willing and able to provide any needed help. Experience has shown that a personal support network should have at least three people. Each personal support network should know everything about the person's disability and the kind of help that person may need. A personal support network can be made up of family, co-workers, or neighbors. Persons should choose network members who are strong enough to do the physical tasks that may be needed, can communicate clearly, and can guide the person to safety.

Third, people with disabilities should pre-stock a survival kit of supplies. Depending on the person's needs, two kits may be needed: one for staying put and another in case of an evacuation. In general, the items in the kit should be enough for at least three days, considering first having fresh water, food and clean air. While individual needs must be considered, the following are rule of thumb for the kits:

- One gallon of water per person per day for drinking and sanitation. Store water tightly in clean plastic containers.
- Non-perishable food such as ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits, and vegetables,

protein or fruit bars, dry cereal, peanut butter, dried fruit, nuts, crackers, canned canned juices, powdered milk, vitamins. A manual can opener is a must.

- Flashlight and extra batteries, a battery powered radio and extra batteries, first aid kit, toilet articles, prescription medicines, candles and matches.
- Duct tape and plastic sheeting (or heavy-weight garbage bags) to seal doors and windows, and N95 dust masks.
- Personal sanitation items such as moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties.
- Special items for special needs, such as food and water for pets and assistance animals, batteries for hearing aids, wheelchair accessories, oxygen, or baby supplies.

While most of us hope we will never have to put an emergency plan into action, being prepared can do much to get us through any emergency. Guides and checklists to help in preparing a plan are available online. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission publishes the *Home Guide to Emergency Preparedness*, which is available in five languages in addition to English. The guide also contains local information specific to Northern Virginia. To get a copy online, visit their Web site at www.novaregion.org/emergency.htm, or call 703-324-3187, TTY 703-324-2935 to request a copy.

The American Red Cross is an excellent source of information for all things disaster related. Their Web site, www.prepare.org, contains information on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, children, and even pets and companion animals. Materials are also available at local chapters or by calling the American Red Cross of the National Capital, Fairfax office, at 703-964-0004, TTY 711.

The National Business and Disability Council has an emergency evacuation checklist for the workplace. To order a copy of the checklist, call 1-516-465-1519, TTY 711.

The Next DSB Meeting is

on the second Monday
of the month, 7:30-9:30 p.m.

Government Center
12000 Gov. Ctr. Parkway
Fairfax

Meetings are open to the public; public comment, no more than 3 minutes in length, is welcome during the public comment period. For information or to request accommodations, please call 703-324-5421, TTY 703-449-1186, or send an e-mail to disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov.

Get Weekly Disability News

Disability Services E-News is a listserv that keeps subscribers informed about resources and issues that affect people with physical and sensory disabilities.

The listserv sends out one brief e-mail each week. The listserv is the primary vehicle for publicly announcing meetings and activities of the Disability Services Board and will in the future tell you how to get online issues of the *Disability Services Beacon*.

To subscribe, simply go to www.fairfaxcounty.gov/email/lists/. Fill in your e-mail address, click on the box before "Disability services and news," and then click subscribe. You will be sent an e-mail asking you to respond in order to finish subscribing. You must respond to this e-mail and write "ok" in the body to complete the subscription.

Fairfax County is committed to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in all county programs, services, and activities. This document is available in alternative formats upon request. Please call 703-324-5421 or TTY 703-449-1186, or send an email to disabilityservices@fairfaxcounty.gov. Allow 7 working days for preparation of the material.

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